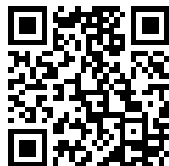

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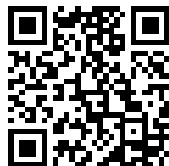
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Three
Renaissance Silhouettes

Sidney Hellman Ehrman



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THREE RENAISSANCE SILHOUETTES

THREE RENAISSANCE SILHOUETTES

By
SIDNEY HELLMAN EHRMAN

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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
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THREE RENAISSANCE SILHOUETTES

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by

Sidney Hellman Ehrman

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To
A TRUE HUMANIST,
A REAL FATHER AND A WONDERFUL FRIEND
SIDNEY M. EHRMAN
WITH UNBOUNDED LOVE

FOREWORD

THE production of this work would have been an impossibility but for the invaluable assistance rendered me by my guides and counsellors during the time of its writing. Were it not for their aid, I would have become disheartened and dismayed at the immensity of the task which confronted me. To these then I must at this time express my sincerest thanks and appreciation. Whatever merit is to be found in this small book is due to their interest in its making. The errors are mine; the credit, if any, belongs to them.

Firstly, must I acknowledge my indebtedness to my preceptor, George H. Guttridge, of the University of California. As the man under whom this work was done, his constant advice and sound judgment have provided me with a basis for this study. To Herbert E. Bolton of the University of California are given my heartiest thanks. By his conquering spirit, kindness, and sympathy he has removed innumerable obstacles which lay in the path to success.

S. H. E.

PREFACE

IF one is to know a period, one must know its people. Thus writes a noted historian. In itself, such a statement appears amply conclusive and well rounded. But, asks the layman, just how far should this dictum apply to what is proffered me? Must I be content with merely the externals, the outer manifestations of history, or may I be permitted to gaze further into man's nature and see the workings of his mind? Shall I be permitted to go behind the scenes of the drama or must I constitute part of the audience, and accept as reality that which is merely illusion?

It is not my intention to decry the study of factual history. Its importance and merits are beyond all criticism. It is the basis on which all else must rest. Like the architect, no historian worthy of the name will attempt to build unless his foundation is secure and firm.

However, in this field, as in the building of a house, once the framework and foundation are

completed much remains to be accomplished. A house, perfectly proportioned, artistically decorated, but not overdone, is a work of art as well as a shelter. So with history. There is far more than the factual to a study of the past.

History is a complex study, embracing as it does, not alone actual deeds, but the thought underlying these actions of past generations. There are many who will criticize this view. At first glance it presents *a priori* concepts which, on the surface, appear not alone contestable but almost ludicrously false. The sociologist and psychologist will be prone to warn such followers of history to beware lest they tread on dangerous ground which presents pitfalls for the uninitiated. Others will claim that historiography is limited to a mere recital of actually known events and should confine itself to the straight and narrow path hewn by former generations. Still others will question the right of the historian to "invade" fields which lie within the bounds of other sciences.

To all such objections there is but one answer. In a comprehensive study of history, not only the physical actions of man, but the workings of his mind as well must receive proper emphasis. The

present is ever influenced by the past, and that influence is extended by knowing how the mind of the past has functioned.

Fifteenth century Italy, the scene of this work, was the home of a renaissance. It is impossible to estimate the value and effect of this movement upon our contemporary life. That it is great, is, I believe, incontestable. During this era man became both distinctly individualistic and aware of what is today known as Nationalism. Leaving to one side the concrete accomplishments of this period in the fields of art, literature, science, discovery, and economic change, one may still maintain that a step of tremendous importance was hazarded. The concept Universality which had prevailed over all European thought from the days of Alexander the Great received at this time a fatal blow from which it has never since recovered. It is, therefore, a period not only notable for its advancement in personal thought and outward manifestations, but one marked by a radical change which opened new vistas to man.

Obviously, it is necessary to examine the minds of this epoch if one is to comprehend and evaluate its accomplishments. Errors are apt to creep into

such a delicate study. However, that is no reason why the historian any more than the physical scientist should refrain from pursuing his research. It is only after many attempts that the real, the positive truth or law is finally educed. The oft repeated statement that such a "Law" does not exist and, consequently, can not be found is, perhaps, true. But one will never know unless one has experimented, searched, and tested.

During the research necessary in order to undertake a work of this nature, I have attempted to employ, as far as was consistent, the scientific method of observation. Data have been examined with an unbiased mind and conclusions have been drawn only after all the available facts have been carefully weighed. If I have erred, it has been through no conscious fault of my own.

The characters presented have been chosen advisedly. They are men, famous in their day, who have each rendered some unique service to their time. Each has been treated not only as an individual, but as a part of his *milieu*. To my knowledge, no recent work in the English tongue has been done on any of these exponents of Humanism. Their merits are deservedly great.

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If any infinitesimal part of their due has been paid them, I would feel that this study is not entirely in vain.

SIDNEY HELLMAN EHRLMAN.

April, 1928.

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THREE RENAISSANCE SILHOUETTES

**THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY FROM
1380-1494 A.D.**

THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY FROM 1380-1494 A.D.

BETWEEN 1340 and 1530 A.D. the world as a whole and Italy in particular underwent a strange metamorphosis which is today known as the Renaissance. This movement, producing vast changes in thought and civilization, made possible the centuries which followed. It is the prelude to modernity. In no period of history, with the exception of the last one hundred and fifty years, did so many portentous events occur, concludes one writer in reviewing this epoch.¹ In a certain sense he is correct. Certainly never has man enjoyed and taken advantage of greater freedom of expression, never has he been more completely or avowedly paganistic in his outlook on life. It was an era abounding in color and action, pulsating with the vigor of realized force. Its accomplishments are manifold, and in all manner of artistic productivity it proved worthy of commendation.

The inception from which evolved the Renais-

¹ Dark, "The Story of the Renaissance," London, 7.

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sance was slow and gradual. Its approach was so cautious that the ensuing events appear by comparison more brilliant than they really were. Developments which were to affect its thought had taken root centuries before. It was no sudden move, no solitary action which caused its appearance, but a series of events occurring in the preceding period in history somewhat erroneously termed the "Dark Ages."

By the end of the thirteenth century much of the way had been paved for the upheaval that was to follow. Commerce, with its attendant middle class, was already in existence. Bourgeoisie, residing in towns, manifested their newfound economic independence by successfully demanding political freedom. Through their efforts, this peninsula, the seat of a great civilization long buried beneath the medieval culture of the Holy Roman Empire, was able for a time to rear its head and expel foreign invasion.

Political independence brought to a climax the result of the Middle Ages. Germanic influence and Medieval thought had fallen. Other forces were needed to fill their places. Numerous small states, each possessing complete sovereignty and

claiming the undivided allegiance of their citizens, replaced Imperialism as a form of government. In answer to the cultural void appeared a renaissance and its most distinguished accompaniment, Humanism.

The Renaissance in its absence of political enslavement appears as a momentary lull between two storms, Universalism and Nationalism. Never before or since has Christian man been so politically unfettered. He no longer thought of himself as a member of an all embracing brotherhood. Nationalism had still to take possession of him and oblige him to regard himself as part of a family different from the rest only by reason of the task allotted to him. National pride, race hatred, national honor and superiority were illusions which had not as yet enmeshed man in their coils. Freedom to do as he pleased, to think as he wanted and to go as far as he might, was his for the taking. Rousseau's plea: *Retournons à la Nature* was, perhaps, founded on an appreciation of just this sort of liberty.

Results of the new freedom were not long in demonstrating themselves. After having for generations been enveloped by Christian philo-

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sophy, men forsook their attitude of unquestioning belief and looked earthward. Platonic ethics, differing essentially from their Christian counterpart, entranced and delighted those who probed the inner recesses. Art of the ancients was likewise revived with rapturous comments. The vision that greeted the eyes of the beholder fascinated and bewildered. Brilliant thought mingled with the deeper tones of philosophical speculation luringly invited investigation and trial. Where, asked men of one another, could the like recur but in the work of man? Vigorously they sought to recapture the spirit of the pagan world and to equal its productivity. No longer the pale blue heavens, but the thoughts and deeds of man, formed the subject of their investigation.

What gave deep importance to this new attitude was the emancipation of reason consequent upon the discovery that the best gifts of the spirit had been enjoyed by the nations of antiquity. The ideal of existence distinct from that imposed upon the Middle Ages was revealed in all its secular attractiveness. Fresh value was given to the desires and aims, the enjoyments and activities of man. He was now regarded as a noble being,

not as a diseased excrescence on the world he helped to spoil. Instead of the cloisteral service of the *Incitatio Christi*, the conception was general that communion through knowledge revealed the soul of man. After lying dormant through a long night when "thoughts were as dreams and movement as somnambulism," the intellect assumed its activity, interrogated nature and enjoyed the pleasures of unimpeded energy. Without ceasing to be Christians, men dared once more to exercise their thoughts as boldly as did the Greeks and Romans before them. "The touch upon them of the classic spirit was like the finger of a deity giving life to the dead."¹

At first, as was only natural, man indulged chiefly in antiquarian pursuits, seeking to recapture and familiarize himself with those works which so entranced him. Old manuscripts, Greek statues, Roman coins assumed immense value in his eyes. One can almost credit this generation with believing, that mere contact with a work would suffice to produce in them the art of its creator. In writing, stylism was slavishly adhered to. Cham-

¹ Symonds: "The Renaissance in Italy." London, 1923, Vol. II, 33-34.

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pions of Cicero scorned and were regarded with contempt by followers of Virgil as ascribing to a mode of expression inferior to their own. The *volgare*¹ so well launched in the works of Dante, received a severe setback at the hands of Poggio, Aretino, Salutati, and their followers. Latinity so far became the language of breeding, that it was considered a mark of contempt to inscribe a letter other than in the tongue of ancient Rome.

Out of this vortex where men blindly subscribed to anything emanating from antiquity, came gradual discrimination and order. It was not that enthusiasm for the rediscovered life of the ancients had weakened, but that the Renaissance had matured criticism and tempered admiration with selection. Complete acceptance and imitation were no longer considered the only means to success. Men now dared assume the responsibility of constructive criticism and reason. Such constructive thought was, as always, productive of confidence and originality. The teachings of Christianity were blended with the ideas of Plato, and individuality emerged from the struggle between

¹ The Tuscan dialect which has today become the official and literary language of Italy.

time honored tradition on the one hand, and new ideals on the other. In fifty years the work of Chrysolorus¹ and his pupils had practically disappeared and in its place stood the endeavors of Politian, Ficino, Pontano and Lorenzo.

(Neopaganism arrived almost simultaneously with conscious reasoning. Man frankly partook of the forbidden fruit which fear had hitherto held him from touching. The Book of Life was thrown open and subjected to the close scrutiny of the interested. While continuing to accept at least in form, the doctrines of Christianity, men of the Renaissance no longer concerned themselves with practicing its teachings. Ideals of Greece and Rome occupied its place as the primary interest of the intellect. Feasts to Bacchus replaced holy processions. Blank pages in liturgies became the recipients of sonnets to Love. The art of living ruled Italy.

Independence of body, together with conscious freedom of thought, resulted in Humanism. In

¹ Chrysolorus, 1350-1415 A.D., was a Byzantine of noble birth and the most accomplished and eloquent Greek scholar of his age. He came to Italy in the suite of the eastern emperor John Palæologus. He was invited to remain to teach Greek at Florence, which he did from 1396-1400. All flocked to his lectures and he numbered among his pupils such men as Poggio, Carlo Aretino, Pallas Strozza, etc.

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consequence, values were no longer standardized, the judgment of the individual prevailing over dogmatic codes of conduct. Because of this, man studied carefully the character of his fellows. Interested in analyzing their thoughts, judging their motives, and reviewing their actions he attempted to divine from others what appealed to him. He wanted to know what to do and what to expect. To gain this knowledge, a critical observation of what went on about him was necessary.

Humanism, as experienced during the Renaissance, was an attitude dependent primarily upon the Realization of Mind. It may be defined as having constituted a search into the thoughts of one's fellow men, in order to understand oneself. This resulted in a consciousness of power and an appreciation of the beautiful. Self conscious and highly individualistic, it belonged to a literary age wherein the efficacy of thought was deemed of higher worth than the accomplishment of action. As a product of individualism directed into literary and philosophical channels, it was in a constant state of modification. Its inception and rise to power as an influence dominating the lives of this period finds explanation in its component parts.

Individualism, born of scepticism, underlies all Humanism. It allows man to take nothing for granted but himself, and accepts no *a priori* principle other than his existence. That he exists is realized by the application of doubt to his being. To illustrate: he may doubt the existence of a tree, of a city, or even of the world as he senses it, but not of himself; for the very power of doubt implies existence and existence is essentially an active force. Thus reasons Descartes and in his hypothesis is found the attitude of the Renaissance Humanist. With this dictum accepted, Humanism was well on the road to consummation. In it lies individualism made self conscious by doubt.

Observation was the second and final step towards Humanism. After having achieved self conscious individualism, man, delighted at his own discovery of power, turned to objects about him, inciting his intellect so that he might enjoy the pleasure accruing from thought, the only known reality. With a tolerance born of superiority, he attempted to interpret what he saw and to draw beauty from every possible source as a tribute to his mind. Thus, deduction applied to metaphysical speculation resulting from self conscious

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individualism remained the essence of fifteenth century Humanism in Italy.

Humanism par excellence did not make its appearance in all classes. No movement, no matter how sweeping, is ever more than superficially understood by the lower orders. The intense effort required in order to cope with the exigencies of life allow them little time to do more than touch the outer expression of the ideal. Their part in the Renaissance lay neither in the rediscovery of old manuscripts or in the formulation of ideals of conduct. They did, however, sense the new spirit and, enjoying the liberty arising from its practice, allowed themselves to be subjected to its forms. Emerging from feudal institutions which preached unquestioning obedience, they reacted automatically to the new life suggested by those of greater wealth and authority. Light hearted, gay, effervescent, roaming the cities, collecting in squares or on street corners, flaunting vivid cloaks and flame colored doublets, exchanging the gossip of the day, assisting at

“Youths and maids enjoy today,
Naught ye know about tomorrow.”

From a poem of Lorenzo composed for the feast of Bacchus.

carnivals and feasts, they were, as always, clay, modeled by the artist according to his fancies.

It was the men of letters and the artistic classes who, aided by generous patrons, formulated Humanism and lived Humanist lives. Their rôle can not be exaggerated. By conscious reason and effort they unearthed records of the past and blended them with Christian thought. Every channel of civilization was examined in a search for Beauty. Objects and concepts were explained according to their interpretations. (That the philosophy of these men today no longer impresses one with the elegance or astuteness with which it was regarded by their contemporaries, is due, not to their lack of power, but to the fact that it is impossible to define Beauty in the abstract and to find a universal formula for it. Abstract discussion helps very little in enjoying what has been well done in art or poetry. Neither does it aid one in using words like beauty, excellence, art or poetry, with more explicit meaning. Beauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience is selective and its definition becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its abstractness.) Their failure to hold the interest of modern readers is

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not due to any lack of skill. It arises rather from the nature of the subject with which they dealt in contrast to twentieth century trends of thought.

Just as Humanism failed to affect the lives of all classes with equal intensity, so the results of its influence were not equally perceivable throughout the peninsula. In the south, commerce being of little importance, made the importation of new ideas unfrequent. Consequently, this portion of Italy remained relatively backward. The north, on the other hand, equipped with splendid ports and endowed with a commercial community, acquired knowledge and wealth simultaneously. Eastern merchants, like their ancestors the Phœnicians, deposited the rudiments of their culture and schools of thought at the same time that they sold trinkets to the Dorian savages of Italy.

In this new shift of culture, Florence became the Athens of Renaissance Italy. Within her walls the brightest luminaries of the period sent forth their radiance. During this epoch she gave the world some of the greatest artists that it has ever known. It is due in a large extent to the citizens of this city that the art and literature of Renaissance Italy have remained the goal for subsequent

generations to attain. Claiming allegiance from such geniuses as Leonardo da Vinci, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Dante, Petrarch, Politian, and Lorenzo, she easily earned for herself the title of "Mother of the arts."

At the opening of the fifteenth century, the government of Florence was that of a strong oligarchy operating under the forms of a constitution. Situated on the banks of the Arno, she commanded the fertile plains of Tuscany and lay in the pathway to insular trade. Her citizens, inheriting the artistic genius of their Etruscan forebears as well as their religious impressionability and quick wit caused her at an early stage to become a center of art and learning as well as of trade. In consequence, Florence soon gained a leading position in Italy, assuming the hegemony of Tuscany.

In 1434 began the rule of the Medici, a family of bankers who had acquired tremendous wealth and prestige throughout Europe. In employing their enormous resources in affairs of state they bound themselves indissolubly with Tuscan welfare. For sixty years they were responsible for the peace and prosperity of Florence, although they were

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wise enough never to attempt to change the old republican form of government for which the Florentines had so tenaciously fought.

During this period, Florence enjoyed great mental stimulus. The Renaissance movement was permitted to flourish uninterrupted, and Humanism was allowed free expression. The Medici, as patrons of the arts, gathered about them the flower of the age. By dint of financial encouragement and sympathetic interest they fostered work which has remained a subject of praise and delight to the generations that followed.

The most illustrious member of this family was ✓ Lorenzo il Magnifico.¹ Endowed with extraordinary talents and possessing an understanding and kindly nature as well as keen powers of perception, he took upon himself not only the management of political affairs in Tuscany but also the responsibility of actively directing the artistic progress of the times. His doors were thrown open to all men of intellect and his *palazzos* and villas became veritable Meccas of art. Because of his enthusiasm, the Platonic Academy, founded by his grandfather Cosimo, gained great fame and

✓ ¹ Lorenzo's rule dates from 1463-1492 A.D.

honor. He collected libraries, built churches and subsidized painters. In addition to all this, Lorenzo was himself a creditable performer of the arts. His sonnets in the *volgare* are remarkable for their beauty and vivid expression of the spirit of the times. A product of the Renaissance, Lorenzo did much to advance its cause. There was no other man in Italy who so closely approximated the Humanist ideal as did this Medici. Through his efforts the Golden Age of Renaissance expression dawned supreme.

For different reasons, Rome like Florence proved a Humanist center during the Renaissance. Neither in letters nor in art had the Papal city any real life of her own. Her intellectual enthusiasms were exotic. Given impetus by one Holy Father only to be thrust into oblivion by the indifference of the next, Humanist endeavors were subjected to rude vicissitudes and flourished fitfully. A transplanted flower, the effects of the Renaissance were alternately checked and encouraged according to the whims of the man in office.

However, Rome possessed one class of Humanists who were always welcome. This group was the apostolic secretaries. During the time of the

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schisms and councils, these men, able to compose skilful letters and documents and discharge their duties as accomplished orators were deemed indispensable, and their services were well rewarded. In time they became a separate class, greatly feared because of the power they wielded. Divided from the nobility by reason of their birth and foreign connections and from churchmen by their secular status and avowed impiety, they mingled in society with both, trusting to their talents to support their dignity. Through them the spirit of Humanism, antagonistic to the spirit of the Church, possessed itself of the eternal city. Much of the attitude which marked Rome during the Renaissance may be ascribed to the influence of these paganizing scholars who were freed from the restrictions of family and local opinion and indifferent to religion.*

Social life in the two cities differed as widely as did the tone of their literary endeavors. In Florence life was bustling and happy. An air of youth and vigor pervaded the city evincing brilliancy and good humor. On May mornings, the prentice lads tilted beneath the smiles of girls who

* Symonds: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, 156-157.

danced at nightfall in the square of Santa Trinita. Gaily colored awnings protected garrulous vendors who chatted busily as they proclaimed their wares. Processions filed down streets lined with splendidly clad men and women who crowded around the riders, acclaiming their heroes, laughing at the antics of the clowns, commenting freely on all that they saw and heard. A sense of physical fitness, of impetuosity, of dashing romance, distinguished the people of the Tuscan capital. Peace brought by the rule of the Medici induced light heartedness. The gala air was omnipresent. Every day was a feast day in the eyes of this thriving, busy community.

Political instability and the solemn spirit of the Papacy caused social life in Rome to take on a far less brilliant tone. It lacked the informality and jollity apparent in Florence. Matured by the realization of a long and glorious past, it adopted a solemn and decorous air befitting the capital of Christendom and former seat of Emperors. When the city unbent it became ludicrous; like an octogenarian playing on the carpet. In consequence, the Humanist social life which appeared between paternosters was carried on in muffled

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tones and behind closed shutters. Its tone, dictated by the highly sophisticated apostolic scholars, reeked of perversion and decadence. When paganism occurred it was accompanied by immorality shielded by hypocritical protestations of "Naturalism." An ominous air surrounded every day life. Dealers, disposing of their goods, hurried home to sunless houses in narrow streets. Cosmopolitanism and the strife of various factions made large gatherings unpopular and freedom of speech impossible.

The growth of self-conscious individualism and the two cities in which Humanism was most likely to be encountered have been already described. A few threads only need be caught up in order to complete this brief survey of a phase of the Renaissance in Italy. That the ideals and effects of Humanism were unevenly divided are points which have been emphasized, but the different reactions towards its influence on people belonging to the same class and residing in the same community is a subject that remains open for consideration.

Environment and psychological differences provide one reason for dissimilarity. Some men

were imbued with a love of life which, carefully fostered, developed and itself produced new influences. Many felt that Humanism failed to satisfy the inherent spiritual need of man and so dismissed it in disgust. Others were literally forced into contact with Humanism and the absorption of at least some of its more commonly accepted dictates became imperative and unconscious. One person found in it a means to temporal power, while another saw chance for advancement coming only with its fall.

In a final analysis the reason can be found in the Humanist movement itself. As has already been remarked, Individualism comprised an integral part, if not the whole, of Humanism. Now, all forms of intellectual activity move from different starting points and by unconnected roads. As products of the same generation, they take on a common character and unconsciously illustrate each other, but their ends are solitary, dependent as they are on individualism. No two men describe the same object alike. Each is swayed by that which he wishes to view. Humanism, because it was essentially a product of the individual mind, defeated uniformity of thought

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and expression. It followed the mathematical principle that, no matter how many times the number one is multiplied by itself, it remains one.

This dissimilarity caused by Humanism explains the catholicity of the Renaissance. All fields of art and science were assiduously reviewed. Explorers, scientists, printers, painters, poets, philosophers, statesmen, worked side by side, advancing, accepting, disregarding various theories. The individual himself was characterized by this many-sidedness. He exemplified the age in which he lived, not alone by virtue of his contradictions between thought and action, but by the many fields of study which he pursued.

The Renaissance was an age of personalities. Fifteenth century Humanists were the frontiersmen of modern civilization, seeking to establish themselves in uncultivated fields which neglect had made wild. They hacked and cut at barriers to free thought, uprooting trunks which stood in the way to historical perspective and clearing the new vistas of ignorance and prejudice in their search for Beauty. Some found it a difficult task while to others it proved relatively easy; one man persevered while his neighbor reached a certain

point and stopped, unable to continue further. None totally triumphed over the soil of ignorance, but all faced their work with zest, meeting it with a conviction of their own power. It held the essence of glamour and romance, of exploration and conquest. Whether this work bore fruit was after all of no concern to these men. The individual is allotted only a brief space of time in which to live. If that interval is well filled and has given proof of happiness and contentment, failure is just as well, for success destroys desire and desire is the seed of Life.

POGGIO GUCCIO BRACCIOLINI, 1380-1459 A. D.

POGGIO GUCCIO BRACCIOLINI, 1380-1459 A. D.

*"Virtue Alone Constitutes the Character of a Truly Great Man."*¹

THE sun was slowly sinking over the hills of Rome. Its rays, softened and golden, sped across the gardens of the Vatican. Their gleam rested upon the windows of the pontifical palace, peering through the narrow latticed panes of the loggia.

Within, all appeared tranquil and serene. The long galleries connecting the wings with the main building were deserted and noiseless. Everything breathed a spirit of contentment and peace, of work well done.

At one extremity of a cozy room in the west wing a small fire place held fast dying embers. Before these, in a sort of semicircle, were to be found a half score of men seated in comfortable chairs, laughing and joking. Now and again one of their number recounted some coarse or witty anecdote concerning a well known citizen, perhaps his Holiness

¹ "Poggii Opera," Basle, 1513, 358.

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himself. As the speaker finished, his sally was greeted by a burst of laughter. Jeers and questions hurled at him by the incredulous, generally provoked but another tale.¹

Upon such a scene the chimes of St. Peter's resounded, marking the close of day. One by one the assemblage sauntered from the *Bugiale*.² Priests, arm in arm with gaily clad courtiers, laughing or arguing as the case might be, leisurely quitted the chamber. Finally but one man remained, who seemingly lost in revery, stared steadily at the now darkening embers. Occasionally a satiric smile crept over his countenance, only to be erased by a more thoughtful air.

The person so musing, was a young man in his early thirties, of medium stature, rather slightly built. His olive complexioned face, long and lean, was framed by a crop of dark curly hair, which, already beginning to recede, displayed a high broad forehead. Two large piercing eyes looked out from beneath finely penciled eyebrows. A long aquiline nose with broad nostrils gave further

¹ The probability of this purely imaginative scene finds support in Liseux's explanation of the "*Facetiæ*," Paris, 1887, II, 230-232.

² Name given to this room wherein originated the anecdotes later recounted in the "*Facetiæ*." The term *Bugiale* means a falsehood.

proof to a full sensuous underlip which protruded and curled sardonically. A square chin completes the portrait of the gentleman about whom there was an unmistakable air of passionate resoluteness combined with delicate sensuality.¹ This man was Poggio Bracciolini who, for forty-seven years, was an apostolic secretary, who aided greatly in the discovery of classic manuscripts, who was to prove himself a writer of no mean ability, and with whose name the Renaissance is indubitably linked.

Poggio² Bracciolini was born in Terranuova, a village near Arezzo, in Tuscany, in the year 1380. His father was a notary who had completely ruined himself. At an early age, he was sent to study at Florence where he acquired Latin under the guidance of the noted scholar, John of Ravenna, and Greek under the tutelage of the brilliant and gifted Chrysoloras. The school of Florence already possessed a great reputation, and Poggio had for classmates such boys as Lionardo Aretino, Pallas Strozza, Paulo Vergerio and Guarino Veronese, all

¹ This description has been taken from a portrait of Poggio by Pollainolo hung in the Proconsolo, as well as from a statue of him in the church of Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence.

² The following outline has been taken and reduced from lives of Poggio as recorded by Recanatí, Shepherd and L'Enfant.

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of whom as men were to leave behind them long records of humanist achievements.

Due to the fame of his teachers and in part to the brilliancy of his own work, Poggio found scant difficulty in securing an appointment to the papal court. At twenty, he was created apostolic secretary by Boniface IX, a position which he was destined to fill for nearly half a century. Thus, at an early age he embarked upon a career which, notwithstanding its apparent simplicity, became a remarkably troubled one, owing to the schismatic disturbance of the times.

During the first ten years of his service, Poggio conducted himself in much the same fashion as any young Roman of limited means and good education. He spent his leisure hours in reading and studying and from the company of his fellow scribes gathered a great deal of the material later employed in his "Facetiæ." He also took the opportunity to improve his friendship with Lionardo Aretino,* a friendship which was to produce much in later years. These occupations, together with his work

* More familiarly known as Lionardo Bruni, 1369-1444 A.D. As his writings, however, are listed under the name of Aretino, it has been considered expedient to employ in this work the latter designation.

as secretary and social duties of a lighter and often less circumspect nature, filled his days and nights.

In 1414 the Pontiff, John XXIII, together with his court repaired to the Council of Constance. Here, for the first time, Poggio's writings and interest in antiquity take on a more formal and methodical character, presaging what was to follow. With the flight of the pope, Poggio was left, for the time being, more or less his own master. For the next two years he devoted himself to the study of Hebrew, which he disliked,¹ and to an enthusiastic as well as highly successful pursuit of lost manuscripts.² During this time he traveled extensively, making a trip to Baden in order to enjoy the waters, and in a letter addressed to his friend Niccolo Niccoli, the mode of living which he discovered there is charmingly described.³

At the elevation of Otto Colonna, Martin V, to the papal throne, the Western Schism drew to a close. With its ending, Poggio's freedom precipitately vanished. Not reappointed to his former office and thus lacking means of sustenance, he took

¹ "Poggii Opera," op. cit., 29.

² For a complete list of the manuscripts found during this time see Liseux, op. cit., I, XI.

³ Merau "Les Bains de Bade au xv^e Siècle," Paris, 1876.

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refuge with Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, from whom he had received a flattering invitation, couched in the most promising terms. However, his English visit was doomed to disappointment. The promised rewards proved to be nothing more than a scant benefice; books were scarce, and antiquity practically unknown. It is not strange that under such circumstances he soon returned to Italy, where, having secured his reappointment, he resumed his former life.

From 1420, the main work of Poggio is directed into different channels. The author replaces the antiquarian. Shortly after his return, he wrote his first dialogue "On Avarice," which was well received. A second was in preparation when, due to the flight from Rome of the new Pontiff, Eugenius IV, Poggio was forced to leave the capital in company with his master. After many vicissitudes of fortune, including being stopped on the way and held for ransom, the papal secretary reached Florence, worn and exasperated by his experience.

Upon his arrival at the Tuscan capital, Poggio learned of the eviction from power of the Medici. Fervently espousing the cause of his banished patron, Cosimo, he threw himself into the fray,

penning a series of invectives against Francesco Filelfo¹ who had enlisted on the opposite side.² These writings, scurrilous and unworthy as they were, nevertheless won for him the lasting friendship of the Medici, and upon Cosimo's return to power,³ he and his children were, by decree, declared forever exempt from the payment of all taxes.

[In those days the copying of manuscripts was evidently a gainful occupation, for Poggio now proceeded to purchase a villa at Valdarno from the profits of a Livy which he had copied. Here he set about storing a collection of statues and coins, hunting these with as much enthusiasm as he had before shown in his search for old manuscripts. During this time, at the age of fifty-five, he married. He discarded his mistress by whom he had twelve children,³ marrying Vaggia de Buon-
delmonte, an eighteen year old girl of noble family who "combined beauty and discretion,"⁴ virtues

¹ An Italian who became one of the most noted Greek scholars of the day, 1398-1481.

² These invectives, to be again referred to, may be found in "Poggii Opera," op. cit., 198-257.

³ Lorenzo Valla: "Antidota," in "Mancini vita di Lorenzo Valla," Florence, 1891, 287.

⁴ "Poggii Epistolæ," lvii., Epist. xxxvii.

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which were apparently lacking in the happy bridegroom.

Occupations of such a nature did not, however, prevent Poggio from following Eugenius to Bologna. Here he effected a reconciliation between the Pope and Cardinal Julian thus frustrating the efforts of the Council at Basle. The turbulent period of the papacy having now ended, one finds Poggio devoting himself more and more to his writing. In the next decade he published a collection of his letters, wrote his "Dialogue on Nobility," The Eulogies upon Niccolo Niccoli, Lorenzo de Medici,^{*} Cardinal Santa-Croce and Lionardo Aretino, as well as "A Treatise upon the Unhappiness of Princes," dedicated to Tomasso de Sarzana who was soon to assume the purple as Nicholas V. The result of these labors firmly established Poggio as one of the leading literary figures in Italy, a position which he succeeded in maintaining up to the time of his death.

In 1447 Eugenius IV died, and was succeeded by Nicholas V. To this pontiff, regarded as a man of letters and a patron of the arts, Poggio wrote and

^{*} Brother of Cosimo de Medici and not to be confounded with Lorenzo il Magnifico.

solicited an annuity, pleading old age and a desire to pursue more closely his literary endeavors.¹ His request was most generously complied with and Poggio now found himself definitely shielded from want. Never was he more prolific. In quick succession were produced the dialogues, "On the Vicissitudes of Fortune," "On Hypocrisy," his "Historia Disceptativa Convivialis" and an invective against the weak anti-pope, Felix V. He also kept his friends in constant laughter with invectives directed against Lorenzo Valla which proved, that despite age's usually heavy toll, the irascibility of the author's temper remained quite unimpaired.

But this was his last quarrel. In 1453, due to the protection and patronage granted him by the Medici, Poggio was tendered the office of Chancellor of the Florentine Republic, whither he repaired together with his wife, five sons and a daughter. Soon after his arrival, he was made Prior of the Arts of Florence, a position which greatly pleased his dignity. In this capacity, and in comparative tranquillity, he spent the remaining days of his life writing his "Facetiæ," "A Treatise upon the Woes

¹ "Poggii Opera," op. cit., 287-292.

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of Human Fate" and an excellent "History of Florence." He died, greatly mourned, on the thirtieth of October, 1459, at the age of seventy-nine. His remains were paid signal honor and interred in the church of Santa Croce while his portrait was hung in the Proconsolo, and a statue erected to his memory on the façade of Santa Maria del Fiore.

Such in brief was the life of Poggio Bracciolini, pontifical secretary and critic of the church, writer of invectives and lover of the beautiful, an immoral moralist. Surely no greater paradox has visited this paradoxical world, no more obstruse and yet illuminating a figure has ever provided a keynote to the times. To invoke an *apologia* for Poggio, to attempt to vindicate his contradictions of thought and action by reconciling them to the period in which he lived, would merely result in casting the man himself into obscurity. The sesame to the character of Bracciolini lies in the fact that he belongs to an age so distinctly individualistic in action, that generalities can play no part in its description.

Intense egotism was a characteristic of Renaissance Italy, and represented an attitude generally

shared in by all. (Humility and humbleness were never so frankly cast aside. In riotous colors, the realization of Being swept the Italian peninsula, enveloping all in its voluminous mantle of conceit and curiosity. Its effect upon people was startling; rulers wrote verse, while poets ruled countries; priests enacted plays in the Vatican while actors played the roles of priests. All sense of order was swept away in one mad dash for the delirious goal—recognition and homage in every field of human endeavor.

Now there lies in the individual a lack of direct interrelation between self-conscious romance and its crystalization, as well as between self-conscious thought and action. It is difficult at such times to arrive at the whys and wherefores of an act, for, while thinking man is a distinctly rational being, he is scarcely a consistent one.¹ Therefore, if thinking man is inconsistent in his thought, how much more inconsistent must he be when his thoughts are translated into actions. He himself must realize this incongruity. To excuse himself in his own eyes, he believes himself to

¹ Glaring contradictions appear even in the works of such men as Berkeley, Hegel, etc.

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be outside the rules of action which he has set down. If this condition be borne in mind, Poggio may be understood. Otherwise, the contradictions and equivocations which beset his thoughts and actions will remain an unordered mass, perplexing and bewildering the reader.

Poggio can be best explained as a frank realist. A superficial study of the man serves to show that he was a poseur, frankly out for glory and above all, for material gain. In a letter to Guarino Veronese, written at the time he found the lost Quintillian, he said: "It is my glory to restore to the present age, by my labor and diligence, the writings of excellent authors. . . . Oh, what a valuable acquisition! What an unexpected pleasure."¹ Yet a few years later, after haggling for his price, he sold his only copy of St. Jerome to Leonardo d'Este, without a qualm.² It is in the light of such contradictory evidence that a fairly balanced insight to the mind of this Renaissance Humanist must be sought.

Above all, Poggio was self conscious. Even in his most sublime moments of passion or anger,

¹ L'Enfant: "Poggiana." Tom.II, 509-513.

² Walser: "Poggius Florentinus," Leipzig, 1914, 501.

he never forgot the importance of his own position. Feeling in himself the reincarnation of the glories of ancient literature, he rushed into quarrels, treated his contemporaries and rivals with barely concealed contempt, and refused to obey in any way those rules of conduct which he had laid down for others.¹

In a study of the character of Poggio, due attention must be paid to his invectives. Student though he was, and possessing a facile and well managed pen, he never succeeded in becoming a great writer, though surely he never allowed one to imagine that he was aware of his shortcomings in any field. His frank criticism of the works of others, leads one to believe that the man thought that only Cicero and he were writers of true Latin.² And yet his friend Lionardo tells us: "Poggio's is a sensitive soul easily wounded . . . of wondrous beauty . . . and most shy."³ Perhaps with age, a realization of his shortcomings came to Poggio,

¹ The presumption in sending an open letter to Beccatelli, "Poggii Opera," op. cit., 349-350, criticizing the obscenity of the latter's work "Hermaphrodite," and then writing his "Facetiæ" is illustrative of the strange mixture of audacity and contradiction which besets his actions.

² Invectives against Valla, "Poggio Opera," op. cit., 141-176.

³ Lionardo Aretino, "Opera," 324.

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and, unhappy in the knowledge of his impotence, he sought to disguise his weakness under a mask of bitter raillery and bluster. One likes to believe this as the reason for his famous invectives against Valla, which otherwise appear a needless work "tarnishing the lustre attached to his name,"¹ and presenting him to posterity in the guise of a ridiculous old man, cruel tongued and venomous. However, much as one might wish to credit this conjecture, it stands so opposed to his makeup that it can be given little weight.

His ambition to become one of the Great was boundless. There can be no quarrel with Poggio on this score. It is the smallness of his nature, his love of tinselled notoriety as a means to obtain his objective, that sickens. Manifestations of character, thought by him to be instruments on the path to success, were but productive of contempt. To vilify a Filelfo, to scurrilously attack a Guarino, did not alone draw attention to himself and to his writings and so prove his superior knowledge in the eyes of the world. These phillipics cannot, like the ones against Valla, be condoned with on the grounds of age and a realization of failure. Poggio

¹ Recanati: *op. cit.*, 57.

at the time of their production was a man in his thirties, young, tempestuous, and self confident. They must stand as the work of a small soul steeped in vulgarity, of one who deliberately defied the canons of good taste in order to grasp publicity and glory. No plea of whimsicality can be attached to, or pardon such statements as, "Filelfo is a defamer of women vomiting obscenity from the succulent stores of his putrid mouth."¹ Such words hold neither beauty or truth. Stripped of their pretense and *raison d'être*,² these invectives bare a small soul, a nature cancered and petty, frivolous and vindictive. They are unworthy of a "seeker of the highest in art," of a Humanist and lover of the truth. ✓

Though quick to take offense, this bloody dualist was, on the one hand, as good a friend as he was fierce an enemy on the other. Often he hurried to the aid of a comrade, proffering all that he had whether in money or in love. His friendship for Niccoli and Aretino are, like precious jewels, deep colored, tranquil, emitting warmth and ✓

¹ "Poggii Opera", op. cit., 339.

² The first invective, culled into being under the cloak of a defense of the character of Niccolo Niccoli, was, in reality, a threat aimed at the vilifier of the Medici.

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brilliancy. Between these men is found a community of feeling that is profound and gentle. It is a rich, sonorous harmony held together and dominated by the powerful melody of the era, a reverent love for the beautiful. His panegyric upon Lionardo, after the latter's death, is a truly noble expression of friendship. Dignified and pathetic, simple in its structure, showing true love and grief, it remains a monument not alone to Aretino, but to the author as well.¹ Contrast this work with his invectives. What explanation can be tendered for these two so different works emanating from the pen of one man? A logical interpretation would be futile. The answer must be sensed. It is but one more proof of the duality of this man, his complexity of character and his strange contradictions. ✓

Perhaps the most illuminating sidelight on the character of Poggio is exhibited in his curiosity. Whatever else this man may have possessed, he certainly had curiosity. His search for the works of antiquity did not confine itself to the collection and investigation of old manuscripts. As a young

¹ To be found in the preface of the Mehus edition of the letters of Lionardo Aretino.

man in Rome, he daily made excursions to the imperial ruins, spending much time in exploring, with minute accuracy describing the deserted and fast crumbling buildings, and in noting all that he observed.¹ His collection of old coins was a very noted one. He filled his villa with statuary which he had collected and acquired on his excursions as an antiquarian. In addition, "struck with awe by the genius of the artist who represents the power of nature herself, put in marble, and carrying an infirmity, an admiration for the works of excellent sculptors,"² he wrote to a celebrated collector, Suffretus of Rhodes, whom he knew only by reputation, informing him that he could not bestow upon Poggio a greater pleasure than by transmitting to him one or more pieces of sculpture which he, Suffretus, might be able to spare from his well furnished gallery.³

Poggio exhibited this extraordinary curiosity not only towards antiquity and art, but towards the lives of his fellow men as well. His letters from Constance, from Baden, and from England

¹ The results of this labor are contained in "*Ruinarum Urbis Romæ Descriptio*," Poggii Opera, op. cit.

² "Poggio, Epist.," op. cit., lvii, 118.

³ "Mehi Vita Ambrosii Traversarii," lii.

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show him to have been deeply concerned with an investigation of his new surroundings and the character of the people he encountered. From Baden he wrote: "every day, I visit the baths so that I may study the people,"¹ and with cleverness and minuteness born from acute observation, he paints a vivid picture of the lives of the frequenters of this watering place. From Constance, he sent an excellent description of the trial of Jerome of Prague² in which he not only exposed the corruption and discomfiture of the judges, but, as a certain writer says, gives us a touching and thoroughly understanding portrait of the man.³

Egoism is manifested in his curiosity as well as in the writings of Poggio. One can easily imagine this intense Humanist walking at night through the narrow streets of Rome, watching the windows, observing the passers by, analyzing, philosophizing. Or, on a sunny day, one can see him sauntering by the gaily painted stalls of Florentine merchants, sniffing at a flower, testing the hardness of a piece of fruit, playing the great lord incognito,

¹ Merau: *op. cit.*

² "Poggii Opera," *op. cit.*, 301-305.

³ Shepherd: "Life of Poggio Bracciolini," Liverpool, 1802, 89.

curious, patronizing, stopping here and there to chat, exchanging the time of day with his acquaintances. For him the world was a stage, and its inhabitants all enacting roles for his special benefit. To Niccoli he writes: "It gives me pleasure to stand aloof and watch the wandering throngs, to join in their activities now and again but merely for a closer observance of their actions."¹ He imagined himself, like Petrarch, seated upon the summit of a lofty mountain, looking about him, philosophizing upon the fragility of the world at his feet—of *genus homo*, but not *homo sapiens*.

In only one respect were Poggio's actions consistent with his thoughts. This consistency, which is, however, irreconcilable with his professed loftiness and "supremacy of mind" ideal,² is found in his moral life. That was habitually loose. Often chided for this laxity, he never took the trouble to conceal or deny it but contented himself with politely sneering at the morality of his advisors.)

Yet moral laxity is more easily understood and forgivable than were other traits in the character

¹ "Poggii Epistolæ," op. cit., lxvi, 204.

² "Dialogue on the Respective Merits of Cæsar and Scipio."

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of Poggio. The times in which he lived are noted for just this sort of looseness. It was an age in which a pope not only openly recognized his children but caused them to be installed in apartments in the Vatican, creating them princes of the Holy See.¹ It was, therefore, perfectly natural that Poggio failed to observe certain moral precepts. In addition to this excuse of environment, he consistently expressed himself on the subject of celibacy. It was on this account that he refused to take religious orders although they would have bestowed upon him further material advancement. He frankly says: "I am not like Menendemus, a moral rejector of pleasure."² Never bawdy, Poggio ever continued to enjoy to their utmost the pleasures of the body and of the senses. He was indeed in all things a sensualist, gratifying his tastes whenever possible, whether it was in realizing beauty in works of art, in literature, or in love.

The paradox of Life is revealed by Poggio in the many sidedness of his character. Covetous, he was, yet liberal to a fault where his friends were concerned; the materialist and realist battled

¹ Alexander VI.

² "Poggii Epistolæ": op. cit., xii, 45.

with the romantic in his character; a literary light, he often wielded his pen with such injustice that it became the tool of a professional dualist and scandal monger rather than the weapon of truth and beauty; possessing a remarkable aptitude towards learning, some of his knowledge was of a curiously distorted nature; at times endowed with a frankness that was alarming, he could, when occasion arose, dissimulate and fawn like the best of them; courageous in his attacks upon his enemies and quick to laugh and mock, he cried and writhed before derision; admiring and extolling bravery, he yet feared poverty or any sort of hardship. One can not seek to understand him, to explain his actions by his thoughts. He is a man apart, an arresting figure, because of his deeds, and because of his attempts.

In the evening, as the moonlight steals through the stained glass windows of Santa Maria del Fiore, the traveler can see the statue of Poggio standing in the shadows of the nave, watching with symbolic calm the passing of the world, waiting for what is to come. Slowly it appears to stir. The diaphanous folds of velvet marble, draped toga-like about the body of the man, rustle in the pregnant quiet

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of the cathedral air. Originally forming a part of the façade, it was taken down a century later when the church was redecorated and replaced in the nave where it now stands in the midst of a group representing the twelve apostles.¹ Thus the narrator of the "Facetiæ" today keeps on good terms with the narrators of the Gospel. As the pale silver light falls upon the lips they tremble slightly. Perhaps they are parted in silent laughter. One wonders. . . .

¹ Shepherd: *op. cit.* (a) 484.

ANGELUS AMBROGINI POLIZIANO, 1454-1494 A. D.

ANGELUS AMBROGINI POLIZIANO, 1454-1494 A.D.

Us,—While the year fast dying, melts away.
The pensive hour again invites
To Poetry's sublime delights;
And deepening shades, and star-illumin'd nights,
Bid us improve the ever fleeting day.
Angelus Poliziano.¹

THIS character study presents a story of friendship and devotion. It is not a particularly pleasant narrative nor, indeed, a very lively one. The telling of it is not difficult, for the life of its hero, like his beloved river Arno,² flows tranquilly and passively along well worn channels. There are no mighty falls to reverberate through time's caverns with the dull roar of intrigue and deeds of action. It is rather the story of some limpid stream wandering shyly amid fields of flowers, sparkling in the sunlight, caressing with adulation and love the bank which lends its passage. Sud-

¹ Greswell: "Memoirs of Politian." London, 1805, 36.

² For Politian's description of the Arno, see the closing stanzas of the poem "Rusticus."

denly its support crumbles and disappears, and with its going, goes the sunlight. The poor little stream, once so gay and sparkling, wanders and weeps for a short while over its loss. Then it, too, vanishes, leaving but the beauty of the flowers it has suckled as mementos of its being.

There are many to whom this sketch will appear but a poor thing, a subject to be passed over in favor of the more glamorous deeds of man. To those, there is nothing more to say. There may be, here and there, a person who will read these pages and understand the sadness, the heartbreak, the divine love, and the adoration of its leading character. To these there is also nothing more to say. If beauty be found in the life of man it should suffice, for beauty is the ideal of art, and art the infinity of being.

* * * *

Angelus Poliziano was born on July 14, 1454 at Monte Pulciano,¹ a pretty little foothill town of Tuscany. His father, Benedette Ambrogini,² a

¹ From which he derived the name of Politian.

² There appears to be some contradiction as to the family name. See Roscoe's, "Life of Lorenzo de Medici," London, 1797, I, 141. (a). The name Ambrogini, bestowed on him by the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Greswell and Menkenius, is here employed.

jurist of not undistinguished family, held both civil and judicial office at home and abroad under the patronage of the Medici, whose cause he zealously espoused. This partisanship was to cost the father dearly, for in 1464, he was murdered by neighbors representing a faction opposed to the Medici. Thus, at the age of nine, Politian, through one of those tragedies illustrative of the party hatred that in fifteenth century Tuscany mocked at justice, was rendered fatherless and in straightened circumstances.

It was immediately decided that the young boy should seek maintenance and instruction in Florence. In consequence, Politian took leave of his family a few weeks after the tragedy, going to the home of some not very wealthy relatives residing at the capital. Once there he enrolled in the School where he acquired instruction from the most learned men in Italy. From Joanes Argyropylus he learned the principles of the peripatetic philosophy, and from Marsilio Ficino those of the Platonic. His preceptor in Greek was Andronious of Thessaline, and in Latin, Christoforo Landrino. Such masters, if only by the lustre associated with their names, were bound to inspire

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the boy with enthusiasm as well as to draw from him the very best in his character.¹

That the lad responded to the efforts of his teachers, and, moreover, was possessed of more than ordinary ability, were facts soon made evident. From the first, Politian showed great brilliancy and promise. However, the lack of money, which he had been sent to Florence to gain, preyed heavily on the boy's mind. For a time he was in danger of being compelled to seek a living as assistant in a shop. His dread of being forced to enter a trade and to give up his studies is expressed in a Latin poem written at the age of fifteen and addressed to the young but celebrated philologist, Bartholommeo Fonte, who assisted him with guidance and encouragement.² Fortunately, aid of a more material nature arrived, probably through the Medici, in whose cause his father had lost his life.³ Henceforth, Politian was never harassed by monetary problems.

Now turning his entire attention to his studies,

¹ Greswell: *op. cit.*, 2.

² "Prose Volgari di Angelo Ambrogini Politiani," Florence, 1867, 109.

³ Greswell: *op. cit.*, 2. The fact that the source of this aid is not mentioned elsewhere leads one to conjecture as to the authenticity of the author's statement.

"this youthful comet blazing across the sky illuminating once more the dawn of learning,"¹ threw his soul into his work. In 1470, "having done with philosophy as dogs do with the Nile: one drink and away,"² he undertook the task of translating the *Iliad* into Latin verse. Carlo Marsuppini had already translated the first book, so Politian began with the second. It was a great undertaking for one so young but his grace of diction, melodiousness, and richness of versification proved equal to the task, causing general surprise and admiration. The doors of the Medici flew open to the young genius, and at this time commenced that friendship and love for Lorenzo de Medici which hereafter ruled his life.

In two years' time Politian had translated four books of the *Iliad*, the last of which was dedicated to Lorenzo. There, progress on this work stopped, the author never completing his task. Perhaps it was, as one writer says, because he may have arrived at the point where he doubted whether a Latinity which strove after the elegance of the Augustian age was suited to the old Greek epic.³

¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

² von Reumont: "Lorenzo de Medici," London, 1876, II., 48.

³ *Ibid.*, II, 51.

During this period, Politian completed two works in the *volgare*, which were to give him his greatest claim to immortality. In 1472, he journeyed to Mantua with Cardinal Francesco de Gonzaga, an intimate friend of the Medici and while there composed his "L'Orfeo Tragedia." This work which gains fame as being the first example of a profane drama in the Italian tongue, was completed in the space of two days. The author wrongly considered it "an imperfect effort . . . worthy of the fate prepared by the Lacedemonians for children born weak or crippled."¹

The journey to Mantua soon over, Politian returned to Florence embarking upon a work which was to remain his masterpiece. This poem, "La Giosta," better known today as "L'Elegantissime Stanze," was written to celebrate the joust of Giuliano de Medici, younger brother to Lorenzo. The panegyric, though never finished, is ranked as being on a par with the greatest works of Boccaccio, Ariosto, and Tasso.

By this time Politian, thoroughly belonged to the Medician household enjoying the comradeship of Lorenzo and his court. He had become the close

¹ "Opera Angelus Politiani," Florence, 1494, 384.

companion of il Magnifico, accompanying him everywhere and exchanging with him love, admiration and esteem.

Foreign invasion and the plague struck Florence in the summer of 1474. Lorenzo, fearing for the safety of his wife¹ and children, sent them to Pistoja, together with Politian, who, at the request of his friend, went along in the capacity of tutor to Piero, the eldest son. It must have been an irksome task for the young poet, separated from his adored comrade and the brilliancy and wit of his circle. Madonna Clarice, already far gone in consumption, and by nature proud and stiff, never understanding her husband, and disapproving of his brilliant, sarcastic, rather Bohemian friends,² was hardly company for the young lyricist. Moreover, as a very devoted mother, she was apt to resent as harmful to her sons the lax attitude which Politian held towards morality.

Such a combination of dislikes was bound to cause disturbances. These were not long in arriving. In October the party left Pistoja,

¹ Clarice Orsini.

² Janet Ross: "Lives of the Early Medici as told in their Correspondence." Boston, 1911, 208.

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repairing to the Medici villa at Fiesole. Politian chaffed at the dullness and restrictions placed upon him. Madonna Clarice resented his attitude of superiority. In November the household once more moved, this time to Caffaggialo, a melancholy winter resort, distinctive for its loneliness and rainy weather.¹ Here an open break ensued. Politian was dismissed, and went to Careggi, where he dispatched letters of explanation to his Lorenzo. The latter, harried by continued war with Rome, as well as the "dread disease," did not attempt to effect a reconciliation between his wife and friend, but sent the latter to his villa at Fiesole to rest and write. Madonna Clarice, hearing of this, wrote her husband a letter of protest, claiming that Lorenzo's support of Politian made her grievance appear in the wrong.² Though continuing to see him constantly, Lorenzo was finally forced to deny Angelo the house, and the education of Piero was entrusted to the hands of others.

Broken in spirit by being thus separated from his patron, Politian spent the next year at Naples.

¹ Ibid., 213-214.

² Fabroni: "*Laurentii Medicii Magnifica vita*," ii, 288.

He was well received by Alfonso and honors were liberally bestowed upon him. Upon his return from "exile" a reconciliation was effected between Madonna Clarice and himself. Piero was given back to him, and in 1484 and 1488 when the latter went to Rome, in the first instance to salute Pope Innocent VIII, and in the latter to get married, it was his master, Politian, who accompanied him.

Though harassed by worry and disappointment the poet had not during this period neglected his work. On the contrary, he composed many Latin poems, Greek epigrams and engaged in voluminous correspondence with noted scholars and rulers throughout Europe. When he was reinstated as a member of Lorenzo's household, he quickly resumed his old position of pedagogue. He began to give lectures at the University, first a series on Virgil and then a similar group on Aristotle. Two of his most famous works in Latin were written to serve as introductions to these courses. One was his group of three poems, called the "Sylvae," written for the Virgil series and the other, the "Lamia," a prose work for Aristotle.

His lectures were crowned with success and he

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gathered around him hundreds of the greatest minds of Europe.¹ It is said that such remarkable respect was held for his learning that daily his five hundred pupils escorted their master to and from classes.² In 1485, amid the plaudits of the entire city, he was granted the degree of Doctor of Common Law.

During the next seven years, Politian spent a peaceful, uneventful life, alternating between the villas of his patron and his classes at Florence. His efforts and erudite works, together with those of Lorenzo, Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, lent renown to the Platonic academy. Often these four friends walked together in the gardens of Careggi at Fiesole, talking and exchanging views upon philosophy, religion, love or literature. Politian daily became more attached to his patron and friend. Under the impetus and enthusiasm of Lorenzo were written his poems and sonnets in the *volgare*, collected under the title of the "Rispetti" and the "Ballante." His letters reflect the happiness to which he had fallen heir.

Suddenly all was ended. On Saturday, April 7,

¹ Greswell: *op. cit.*, 81.

² Menken: "Vita Politiani, Leipsig," 1736, 284.

1492, Lorenzo was taken fatally ill at his villa at Careggi. On Sunday he died. Thus was torn away the support of this little circle. Politian was deprived of his patron and comrade. The love, the passionate reverence of a lifetime, the adored friend was no more. Blindly, he sought the now vanished light. From the ensuing darkness was torn a cry whose grief and beauty remained long after the wound had ceased to throb.¹

¹ del Lungo: "Prose Volgare e Poesie, etc., di Angelus Ambrogini Politiani," Florence, 1867, cclvi.

"Who from perennial streams shall bring,
Of lasting floods a ceaseless spring?
That through the day in hopeless woe
That through the night my tears may flow,
As the reft turtle mourns his mate,
As sings the swan his coming fate,
As the sad nightingale complains
I pour my anguish and my strains.
Oh, wretched, wretched past relief:
O grief, beyond all other grief.

Through heaven the forked lightning flies,
And prone to earth my laurel lies:
That laurel, boast of many a tongue
Whose praises every muse has sung,
Which every dryad of the grove,
And all the tuneful sisters love.
That laurel, that erstwhile displayed
Its ample honours; in whose shade

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After that, there was not much left. For Politian life was over. Death he sought with an eager hand. At the earnest request of his former pupil Piero, now installed in his father's chair, he collected and edited his letters. But he wrote little more. To make matters worse, in less than a year, the family of his beloved master was forced to flee from the city for which they had done so much. His own property was plundered during the fearful disorders that accompanied Savonarola's ascendancy to power.

Happily he did not live long. Brooding and despair wasted away his frame. To live without his Lorenzo was to make living a mockery. On

To louder notes were strung the lyre,
And sweeter sung the th' Aonian choir,
Now silent, silent all around
And deaf the ear that drank the sound.

Who from perennial streams shall bring,
Of lasting floods a ceaseless spring?
That through the day in hopeless woe,
That through the night my tears may flow.
As the reft turtle mourns his mate,
As sings the swan his coming fate,
As the sad nightingale complains,
I pour my anguish and my strains.
Ah, wretched, wretched past relief,
O grief, beyond all other grief!"

September 24, 1494, he breathed his last. His remains were hurriedly deposited in the church of San Marco.

There are in the character of Politian, two traits which must forever be borne in mind: his love for Lorenzo and his enthusiasm and emulation of ancient life and literature. It is these characteristics which he displayed most splendidly and most often. They furnish the principal keynote to his character and writings.

The life of Politian was smooth flowing in that it lacked the worldly ambition which stamped itself upon men of his era. Beyond having enough to keep him from want, Politian had no real desire for material gain. In a poem to Lorenzo he jests of his shabby clothes and smilingly acknowledges his rags.¹ His love of rural life and its attendant peace and comfort are clearly apparent in "Rusticus." All that his needs required were decent food, a cheerful room and good company. The lyrical quality, ever present in his poetry, shows his tranquillity of character.

But if this life of the man was gentle and unfrayed, the soul of the artist presented a far

¹ Greswell, *op. cit.*, 65.

different aspect. In it lay swelling the deep, sonorous harmonies of a Brahms Oratorio, the rugged turbulence of a Wagnerian prelude. From his heart issued a cry for love, for friendship and for beauty. One sees him standing before his classes arrayed in somber garb, ill formed, with eyes that squinted and looked nervously around, a Roman nose of disproportionate size, thick lips, straight black hair, poorly dressed, a miserable figure upon which to cast the cloak of Socrates. "Yet," Reuchlin tells us, "no sooner had he opened his lips and begun to speak with the exquisite and varied intonations of a singularly beautiful voice than his listeners were chained to their seats."¹ It appears as if the ungainliness of his person were forgotten, and charmed through their ears and intellect, his students eagerly drank in his eloquence and beauty of expression. Thus the soul of the man tore through the confining weaknesses of the body, stretching forth gloriously into the sunlight, lifting itself before the eyes of men, unclad and unashamed.

Perhaps of all his traits his love of beauty was the strongest and the most binding. In his writings

¹ Reuchlin, "Epistolæ," lvi.

whether it be in letters or in poetry, there is something expressive of this search. Essentially lyrical both in style as well as in thought, Politian sought that same smooth flowing limpidity in others. He could no more stand impurity of thought than grossness of expression. They were to him the two cardinal offenses unforgivable in man. Excitement and tension drove him mad. It was this, more than anything else, which brought about his quarrel with Madonna Clarice, for, prior to the journey to Pistoja, they appear to have been on the best of terms.¹ That his surroundings affected his frame of mind may be seen from a letter to Madonna Lucrezia, mother of Lorenzo, written during the same journey, just before the open break occurred: "The rain is so heavy and so continuous, that we cannot leave the house. . . . I remain by the fireside in slippers and a great coat, were you to see me, you would think I was Melancholy personified. Perhaps I am but myself after all . . . I am trying to arm myself with hope and cling to everything so as not to sink to the bottom."²

¹ Ross: op. cit., 177.

² Ibid., 214.

Now the world, as a whole, does not contain such beauty and calm purity as Politian exhausted his poor, weak frame in seeking. It has ever presented a sordid front, ambitious, mercenary, cruel. In many of its phases, the Renaissance exemplifies this conduct more clearly than does any other age. It was an era of strident individualism both in thought and in action. Thus, the soul of this wanderer in vain knocked at the portals of man, seeking understanding and hospitality. While his outward existence found attainment in the ideal of lyrical beauty and purity as exemplified by the Greeks and Romans, the story of his inner self is one of defeat and thwarted longing.

As has been already remarked, Politian was, at an early age, imbued not only with the love of Greek and Roman literature, but with an admiration for the conduct of the ancients as well. The title of *Homericus-Juvenis*, bestowed upon him after his translation of the fifth book of the Iliad, meant something greater to the young writer than poetic fame. It was a goal towards which he strove to approach both in conduct and in writing.¹

¹ "Opera A. A. P.," op. cit., p. 267.

If one may judge by his actions his life was not regulated in accordance with a code of morals but by his sense of taste. In the sensing rather than blindly accepting what is right one finds the *raison d'être* for the various deeds which he performed or is credited with performing. It is significant of his taste when one adds that in an age wherein abstract thought found itself diametrically opposed to actuality, the life of Politian achieved the legitimate working out of the Humanist ideal.

This following of the dictates of taste, which so completely guided the character of Politian, found an outlet in his manners as well as in his writing. He carefully chose the pastimes in which he was wont to indulge as well as the subjects upon which he wrote. How typical of the man are his passages in his "Rape of Europa" wherein he describes Europa's abduction by Jove:

"Beneath a snow white bull's majestic guise
Here, Jove concealed by Love's transforming power,
Exultant bears his peerless, blooming prize
While wild with fright she views the parting shore,
Her golden locks the winds that adverse rise
In loose disorder spread her bosom o'er.
Light gloats her vest by the same gales upborn:
One hand the chine, one grasps the curling horn.

"Her naked feet, as of the waves afraid,
 With shrinking effort seem to void the main;
 Terror and grief in every act—for aid
 Her voice invokes the fair attendant train.
 They, seated distant on the flowery mead
 Frantic, call for their mistress loved, in vain.
 'Return, Europa!' far resounds the cry
 While on sails Jove intent on amorous joy."¹

Such poetry is calm and cool. It has the beauty of a marble frieze. There is perfect rhythm and motion but a noticeable absence of sensuality about it. The writing, like its subject matter, is ethereal and gossamer. It is the ephemeral, rather than the earthly expression of a man who lived in a world long past.

Let it at once be said that this attitude towards life was not a pose with Politian. It was as much a part of the poet as was his ability to feel. It did not, as was the case with many of his contemporaries, represent an affectation favored during this time. Politian as the intimate of Lorenzo de Medici, the most powerful prince of contemporary Italy, had many opportunities to acquire worldly gain, honors, and riches. That he asked for no

¹ Gresswell: *op. cit.*, 14.

great favor,¹ nor allowed himself to be swayed by praise and adulation, remains sound proof that his real interest lay not in realities but in sensation. The view from Careggi excited him far more than did the jewels of his friend. In the former he found the constant colored gems of nature, pure, undefiled, softened against an azure background, while the too obvious glitter and heaviness of the latter appear to have depressed him.² Not that he despised the gifts of man; on the contrary, he admired and lauded them. It is only that for him they bore no lasting worth, for they represented a set of values which, in his scheme of life played no part.³ It was merely a case of unconscious evaluation, a weighing of gifts upon the scales, and a selection of those whose weight was the greatest. Manifesting the true Humanist spirit with constant and unvarying fidelity, earns for Angelo praise that can be accorded to no other of his contemporaries.

¹ He had bestowed upon him several ecclesiastical benefices from which he received an income, but these gifts of Lorenzo were small in comparison with other "plums" given out at this time to steadfast supporters.

² "Epistolæ di Ang. Amb. Pol.," *op. cit.*, cxxii.

³ *Ibid.*

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Beauty, for many, finds its ultimate mode of expression in friendship. There it may give utterance to aching voids, for true friendship fosters confidence and inculcates oneness. Simplicity is its garment. In it lies repose and relaxation. Pretense plays no role in its life. When it reflects adulation it attains its highest point. There it transcends all that is tangible and bases itself upon the dictates of intuition. In such a state and between a worthy donor and a sympathetic receiver, friendship becomes sacred love, passion begotten by proximity but unaffected by sensation. It is unending attainment, desire unfulfilled.

If the outward manifestations of Politian tended to so closely approximate the ancient ideal of taste, it is not surprising that the inner man should seek some outlet similar in texture and lyric in consummation. For Politian, love in its usually accepted sense could not exist. There are many who may exclaim at this statement and point to his affairs with Alessandra Scala and his subsequent attack upon her father, founded it is said, upon the former's marriage to a rival. But records show that Politian's courtship consisted mostly of poetry

addressed in praise of this young girl's literary acquirements rather than of her beauty.¹ It was like the love of Dante for Beatrice or of Petrarch for Laura, an adoration of a beautiful work of art symbolical of the worshiper's ideal.

For Politian, friendship expressed the ideal of love and beauty. This ideal which played so great a part in his life was sought in his relations with Lorenzo de Medici who, warm-hearted, beloved, and generous, showed himself to be a poet as well as a ruler, a performer as well as a patron of the arts and learning. Between these two men widely separated by birth and position, existed a community of interests and tastes. In their relations appear a mutual giving and receiving. To Politian, the Prince proffered protection, comfort, advice and encouragement: to Lorenzo the poet gave the most beautiful thought and expression of the age. Politian held Ficino in revered esteem, loved Pico as a brother, but adored Lorenzo as a God.

Familiarity has been said to breed contempt. If so, the intimacy between Lorenzo and Politian was the exception that proved the rule. Through-

¹ Greswell: *op. cit.*, 144.

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out the lives of these men there existed the closest attachment. Not once did they part in anger. True they experienced disagreements,¹ but these had usually to do with differences of opinion in literary matters and even they were few. In one of his letters to Politian, after having rebuked him for underestimating his strength of mind, Lorenzo hastened to add: "Dear Politian, if anything I have now written appears captious or severe, you must overlook it for it arises from my well known affection for you."² In the same vein Politian writes from Pistoja: "I am longing for news that the plague has ceased on account of my anxiety for you and in order to return and serve you: for I hoped and I thought to be with you: but as you have, or rather my evil fortune has assigned me to this post . . . I endured it for your sake with patience."³ Even after the bitter quarrel between Politian and Madonna Clarice, Lorenzo hastened to comfort and provide ease for his friend, and during his banishment from the house continually visited and corresponded with

¹ Greswell: *op. cit.*, 69.

² Ross: *op. cit.*, 209.

³ von Reumont: *op. cit.*, 70.

him.¹ "I am yours even if the whole world was against me,"² wrote Politian to Lorenzo at one time, and indeed he was.

Biographers of both men have attempted to make light of this friendship. They have implied that on the side of Lorenzo there existed nothing more than the interest of a patron of the arts towards his most promising protégé and that with Politian it was an attitude arising from the literary mendicancy of the age.³ But one may venture to disagree with such writers. This sentiment, at least on the part of Politian, was a force so real that it may well be termed the motivating influence of his life. Proof of the strong attachment which really existed between these two men is to be seen not only in their letters and by their constant companionship, but in facts less obvious. Politian was undoubtedly recognized as the great genius of his time and his favors were eagerly sought for by princes of all nations.⁴ Had he desired mere monetary reimbursement it would have been to his

¹ Ross: *op. cit.*, 125.

² *Ibid.*, 217.

³ Symonds: "The Renaissance in Italy," London, 1923, II, 257.

⁴ Greswell, *op. cit.*, 80-81.

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advantage to proffer the dedication of his works to many of his admirers. But the fact that Politian did just the opposite, leads one to infer that there was something more than money which the poet desired. The grief with which Angelo described the death of Lorenzo is no mere feat of theatrical or artistic simplicity. There was nothing to be gained from a patron who no longer lived. It was a cry from the heart of one who himself lay broken and despairing.

It is highly improbable that Lorenzo experienced to any such extent as Politian the heat of this passion. He was a married man, adored by and adoring his children, occupied with affairs of state. To him Politian was perhaps the brightest pearl in a bejeweled diadem, most admired because of its superior brilliancy and the constancy of its light. But to Politian, Lorenzo was the only gem worth having, the only stone worth keeping, the pearl of life. While Lorenzo lived, Politian existed and wrote; the death of his friend dashed the essence of life from the lips of this hungry soul.¹ Gone were those elements upon which this spirit

¹ Roscoe, *op. cit.*, II, 263, and Symonds, *op. cit.*, II, 258, attribute his death largely to grief over the loss of Lorenzo, while Bembo, Roscoe, *op. cit.*, II, 251, claims this to be the great cause.

depended. Politian was an idealist seeking escape from a harsh world of realities. From the first it was a story of defeat, of unsatisfied longing, of desire unfulfilled.

A variety of incidents present themselves to the student of Politian. Seen in the light of these two impelling forces which made up his character they are facts easily explained and, as such, may be here omitted. His biographers have placed due emphasis on the manner in which his classes were conducted, on the subject matter of his writings, to his relations with the various great men of his time. They have pointed out the poet's fall from dignity in his satires on Bartolommeo Scala, the father of the fair Alessandra and in the invectives heaped upon the head of Marullus, his successful antagonist in the suit for the hand of the young lady.¹

Historians have carefully recorded the actions of Politian. Where they have confined themselves to facts and not to appraisals they have provided the groundwork for this character study. But there are some who have in addition to this ventured upon the task of judging the man, basing

¹ Symonds: *op. cit.*, II, (1) 250.

their appraisals on contemporary codes of moral conduct. Here they have erred, for is it not impossible to hold a man to a set of laws of whose existence or efficacy he is unaware? If one is to hazard a judgment it should be made in the light of what the adjudged believes to be true and right.

Bearing this in mind, one may venture the opinion that the deeds of Politian were not altogether unnatural. Conceded that, according to present day standards of moral conduct, the attacks on Marullus were low and unworthy, were these outbursts more than but weak imitations of Politian's goddess Hera who, in a spirit of rage and spite, had plunged the world into a woeful war? When Marullus married Alessandra, in the eyes of the poet he despoiled a divine work of art. Fury at such an action was but natural to the man who emulated both in thought and in deed his beloved ancients.

Equally unjust have been the reactions of certain writers towards Politian's supposed immorality. From the time of his death he has been charged with having indulged in irregular moral conduct. Sly innuendoes have crept into print. "*Politian, ce bel esprit qui parloit si bien Latin, s'appeloit*

Ange: mais il s'en falloit beaucoup qu'il en eut la pureté," writes one author.¹ Bembo, Valerianus and Barthini have scored as libels and slander the imputations brought against his character, by Paulus Jovias.² But in spite of such champions, opinion persists in attributing some truth to these accusations and in unqualifiedly condemning him for such actions.

His defamers may have been quite correct in their judgment of Politian's moral laxity. A number of his works appear to attest the presence of this weakness, reprehensible in the moral code of today.³ Albeit, is the simple dignity of the scholar destroyed? Is the glory of friendship hereby diminished and dulled? It is not the question of right or wrong as judged by present day standards which bears weight, but whether such conduct on the part of Politian was natural and in accordance with the motivating forces of his character. To the student of Greek and Latin the answer is immediate.

¹ Faydit: "Remarques sur Virgile et sur Homer, etc," Menke, op. cit., 4.

² Jovius in his "Elogia Clarorum Vivorum," Venice, 1546, xxxciii, says of Politian, "*Ferunt eum ingenui adolescentis insano amore percitum facile in letalem morbum incidisse.*"

³ "Quinque Illustrium Poetarum Carmina," 299, 301, 303, 307.

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There are many who have just so fallen. Life is, for idealists, inexorable, demanding its payment for fleeting hours of illusion in the hard monies of awakening. It tears asunder fragile dreams and thoughts, evoking from them the cruel, harsh literalness of their meaning. It seeks, not interpretation for thought, but for what actually transpires. Splendid failures evoke no sympathy in the human drama of strident realities. In this world of deeds one is judged by facts rather than by the motive or unconscious reasoning which impels to action.

The last picture that one sees of Politian is heartbreaking. It attests the rashness and ungratefulness of the world. Alone stood this figure in the city of *miseries*, harsh, discordant notes, agonizing and soul wracking in their strength and terrible portent. Vanished were the days of the *rispetti* and *ballante*, the langorous songs and graces into which the poet had poured his love of the beauty in life. Having given his all to Florence, she knew him no longer.

Dishonored, suspected by the *Piagnoni*,^{*} Politian

^{*} The party of Savonarola so called from the penitential character which they professed, *Piagnoni* meaning Vespers.

crept away to his little villa at Fiesole. There he sought to drown out hideous discords, to recapture the dream which has so precipitately vanished. One warm autumn evening the poet sat broken-hearted in his garden of roses and columbine. As he softly stroked his lute, the *World You Live In* faded, and in its place appeared the fields of Elysium. Lorenzo awaiting him with outstretched arms—the two beautiful Greeks who had transported him to the heights—Cicero welcoming him—hand clasping hand—strong lips drawing from one another passion and friendship, sympathy and understanding—the Blind Poet singing in the twilight—Lorenzo—friendship and Love—realization. Gently the lute slipped from his arms. Politian was with the immortals.

GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, 1463-1494 A.D.

GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, 1463-1494 A.D.

"It is by his works that ye shall know a man"

A TRAVELLER passing through the medieval town of Mirandola in the early hours of February 24, 1463, would soon have become aware that some unusual event was transpiring. The castle, perched on a hill overlooking the sleepy little city, showed signs of extraordinary activity. Light streamed from the small casements illuminating the old grey battlements. Shadows occasionally danced between the tapers and windows presenting weird contorted outlines of human figures. Even the stars seemed to group themselves about the turrets, twinkling and blinking their interest, one to the other. Their silent laughter whispered through the trees and caused the staid banners on the moat to tremble with ill-concealed excitement and impatience.

An air of suspense pervaded the castle. In the banquet hall lined with the crests of distinguished

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ancestors, Giovan-Francesco Pico, Prince of Mirandola and Concordia, a descendant of the Roman Emperor Constantine,¹ strode ceaselessly back and forth. Once he halted his slow, measured tread and turned his eyes above, staring fixedly, as if to pierce the walls that separated him from the chamber on the next floor. Then with a barely perceptible sigh, he continued his vigil. Two pages entered noiselessly and trimmed the tapers. In the far corner of the room knelt a priest quietly saying his beads.

Suddenly the stillness of the early morning was rudely shattered. The Prince and the priest, hurriedly crossing themselves, ran to a casement. A dazzling light in the shape of a fiery garland, hovered about the chamber above.² Brighter and brighter it grew. It seemed almost as if in an effort to cast its portent far and wide, that this circlet of fire sought to blind its beholders. Then with no less remarkable speed than it had come, it disappeared in the heavens. Slowly, the overseer of men and the guardian of souls turned. In

¹ More, "The Life of John Picus, Earl of Mirandola," translated from the work of Giovanni Francesco Pico, Prince of Mirandola and nephew of Pico. London, 1557, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

the light of the burning flambeau their faces, drained of all color, looked seared and grey.

As they faced each other in questioning silence, the sound of women's voices raised in exclamations of joy was carried from the upper rooms of the castle. Of a sudden the noise ceased. The wail of a new born babe floated through the quiet air. Both men fell to their knees and prayed. To the lord of Mirandola and Concordia another son had been born.

Giovanni Pico, for such was the name bestowed upon the child, the youngest of three sons and two daughters born to Giovan-Francesco and his wife, Giulia,¹ showed himself at an early age to be in a fair way of fulfilling the lucky portents present at his birth. As a lad of nine he surprised all who came in contact with him by reason of his virtuosity. His retentive memory was amazing and his progress in his studies exceeded the most sanguine expectations of his friends. His mother, proud and elated, saw to it that so remarkable a mind was not neglected, and he was soon provided with

¹ A member of the house of Boiardo, aunt of Matteo Maria Boiardo, the poet Count of Scandiano. Gardner, "*A Platonik Discourse Upon Love*," by Pico della Mirandola. London, 1918.

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approved masters in every branch of study then deemed necessary to form the gentleman and the scholar.¹

Destined from birth to enter into the ranks of the clergy, the lad was sent to Bologna, where, at the age of fourteen, he undertook the study of canonical law. For the next two years, his small figure could be seen hurrying through the halls of the old university as he went to and from his classes, his robes of Apostolic protonotary rustling around his ankles, his golden curls tossing about his head. As ever, he diligently applied himself to his studies composing an abbreviated digest or manual of the pontifical decretals, so arranged as to furnish an expeditious mode of deducing from them the conclusions desired.²

To a young mind keenly alive, the study of remote usages and obscure traditions must have appeared irksome. The vigorous and speculating intellect of Pico, impatient and curious, demanded a wider range for its powers. As a consequence, the next five years saw him wandering from

¹ Greswell: "Memoirs of Joannes Picus of Mirandola." London, 1885, 155.

² Ibid., p. 156.

university to university acquiring information. The most distinguished men of the time, both in France and Italy were sought out and questioned. In his letters one catches glimpses of Hermolao Barbaro, Politian, Ficino, Guarino Veronese, Aldus and others with whom he already corresponded.¹

Intervals during which he was not engaged in some literary excursion were spent at his rural retreat at Fratta. There he engaged in love affairs and wrote verses about his mistresses which appeared in five volumes under the title of "Loves." He read, drank and made merry during these pauses in his activity, gaily enacting the role of a young prince.

Deeming himself fully prepared, Pico, at the age of twenty-one, entered Florence, the citadel of Art and Learning, bent on forcing its surrender to his brilliancy and charm. Recommended to Lorenzo by his birth and connections as well as by Ercole d'Este, whose sister, Bianca, was his sister-in-law, he was at once admitted into the Medici circle.² His beauty, wealth and learning created a profound impression. The youthful

¹ "In vita Joannes Pici" operibus præfixa: Basle, 1601.

² von Reumont: op. cit., Vol. II, 84.

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genius was admired and praised on all sides. Even his smallest sayings were fraught with significance to his amazed auditors. The profound impression which he created is gathered from a letter written by Politian to whom Pico soon attached himself. In describing him, the poet said: "Nature appeared to have showered upon this man, or rather this hero, all the gifts of body and mind. He was slender, and well made, and something divine seemed to shine in his face. He was acute in perception, gifted with an excellent memory, indefatigable in study, clear and eloquent in expression. One doubted whether he shone more by his talents or his moral qualities . . . he showed himself sublime and above all praise."¹

Basking in the pleasant sunshine of adulation and success, the young Lord of Mirandola remained close to Florence for the next year, leaving it but a few weeks in order to study at Paris. During this time he delved into the philosophy of Plato and became enamoured with medieval Jewish literature. The Hebrew mysteries, which according to Jewish tradition had been handed down from Moses, and which comprised a book on cosmogony

¹ "Epistolæ Angelo Ambrogini Politiani," op. cit., clvi.

and a secret writing describing "the Law" and the method of performing miracles and incantations, fascinated him. In this work called the Cabbalah, Pico discovered analogies to Christian theology not found in Greek doctrines. Such a discovery led him further and further in attempting a reconciliation between Christianity, Platonism and the Jewish teachings. Along with Ficino, he assumed a leading position in expounding the neo-platonism of the day. Although he realized that he stood on ground where investigation and the play of fancy were in danger of provoking trouble from the authorities at Rome, he plunged even further into the "profane" works.¹ To enable him to better support this new learning, he spent a year at the university of Perugia in acquiring a knowledge of Chaldean and Arabic.

While so occupied, Pico found time to indulge in a series of amorous escapades, one of which at least brought him no credit. This affair was amusingly retailed by Aldovando Guidoni, envoy of Ferrara, in a letter to Duke Ercole, which reads as follows: "In May, 1486, Count Giovanni Mirandola . . . giving out the intelligence that he

¹ von Reumont: *op. cit.*, 85.

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was going to Rome, sent forward all his luggage. On his arrival at Arezzo where resided the beautiful wife of one Giuliano de Medici¹ engaged in the administration of taxes there, the said lady, according to previous engagement left her husband's house. She pretended to be going for a walk, but just outside the town she mounted behind the count. He had twenty people with him, some on horseback, some on foot, besides two mounted bowmen. When the people saw the lady surrounded by this train there was an uproar. The storm bell was rung and the count was followed in pursuit which became so hot that he was obliged to give up his fugitive. Every one of his suite that could be reached was killed and stripped in the *mêlée* and many of the citizens were also left dead. Thanks to their horses the count and his chancellor got away to Marciano but there they were arrested . . . The count, because of this, lost greatly in public opinion though indeed love has brought many into like errors."² Nothing more serious than the above related adventure came of

¹ Fortunately for Pico, Giuliano was only a poor, distant relative of Lorenzo.

² von Reumont: *op. cit.*, 86-87.

this. Pico was at once set free and the good natured husband received back into his house the faithless wife who pleaded forcible abduction.¹

Shortly after this episode, Pico set out for Rome in earnest. Having won Florence, he looked for new fields to conquer. During the preceding year, while engaged in his study of oriental languages, he had assimilated much knowledge which he was desirous of displaying. Accordingly, late in 1486, Mirandola, apparently in the highest spirits, left *en suite* for the capital of Christendom.²

Upon his arrival at Rome, Pico printed his "Conclusiones." This medley of philosophy, theology, law, natural science, magic, the Cabbalah, Arabic and Chaldean took the form of a group of nine hundred hypotheses whose validity Mirandola declared himself ready to defend. He issued a challenge to all the leading scholars of Europe inviting them to meet him at Rome at a public disputation. So eager was he to show himself off to advantage, so sure was the young man of his own talent, that his defiance was accompanied by

¹ Ibid.

² "Pici Opera," op. cit., 261.

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an offer to pay the expenses incurred by his opponents in traveling to and from the capital.

As may be imagined, such a challenge created an immense stir. Scholars at the papal court regarded this paragon of learning with astonishment. But wonder at his brilliancy and audacity soon gave way to envy. Fearing proof of his superior erudition,¹ they sought at first to intimidate Pico by the use of lampoons and pasquinades. Failing in this, a more expedient method was resorted to, and gradually the rumor was broadcast, that the theses contained much heretical matter.²

Innocent VIII, anxious to guard against schism and to preserve untainted the minds of the faithful, and especially of the simple and uneducated who flocked to these public disputations, issued a brief enjoining certain bishops, professors and savants to examine the "Conclusiones" and make a report of their real nature and tendency.³ Hearing of this and dreading the result of such an investigation, Pico fled to Florence where he sought asylum

¹ Greswell: *op. cit.*, 251.

² As a matter of fact, many of these hypotheses proved exceedingly bold in their assumptions.

³ Greswell: *op. cit.*, 238.

with Lorenzo. At the end of a year, Mirandola had not alone been unsuccessful in obtaining a hearing for his work but was in danger of being confronted with a charge of heterodoxy.

From Florence, Pico issued his "Apologia" in which he sought to justify his pretensions to wisdom and to refute the charges of his enemies. This work, composed in twenty days, took the form of a letter inscribed to his protector Lorenzo, and was immediately dispatched to Innocent. But, persuaded by his board of examiners that at least thirteen of the theses, if not heretical in character, were actually dangerous, the pontiff, while acquitting Pico of all intentional unorthodoxy, issued a bull suppressing any further publication of the work.¹

Hoping that his absence would allow the storm at Rome to subside, Mirandola set out for France in order to visit various academies. However, his enemies at Rome, not content with the mischief that had already been done, began to cavil against the "Apologia," claiming that it broke the agreement not to discuss the "Conclusiones." Innocent issued another mandate ordering Pico to return to

¹ Greswell: *op. cit.*, 240.

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Rome at a certain date in order to answer the new allegations. Though beset with anxiety and realizing the precariousness of his position, Pico prepared to comply with the summons, when Lorenzo, whose influence with the pope was very great, procured an indulgence, enabling him to remain in Florence. Notwithstanding, the affair dragged on, and it was not until 1492 that a complete exoneration was granted him. This took the form of a papal bull signed by Alexander VI.

During this interim, a great change came over Pico. The gay young nobleman practically disappeared. In his place arose the mystical schoolman intent on reconciling himself and his learning with God. In 1488, Pico settled down at Fiesole within the precincts of the abbey founded by Cosimo de Medici. There he remained for an entire year, never appearing in public, intent upon his reconciliation of Platonism with Christianity.¹ The hours which he allowed himself for relaxation were spent in the company of Lorenzo, Ficino, and above all, Politian. Roberto Salviati and Hieronymus Benivieni were his close associates. The

¹ Greswell: *op. cit.*, 266.

latter, a poet of mediocre ability, became his constant companion and Mirandola, wrote the commentary for Benivieni's work the "Canzone," which remains his only production of any length in the *volgare*.

Pico now published his "Heptaplus" dedicated to Lorenzo. In it he attempted to reconcile the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle. This treatise, containing a mixture of theology and perverted Platonism, tintured with the ever present fanciful doctrines of the Caballah, received high praise. Two years later his "De Ente et Uno," written in the same vein, was inscribed to Politian.

Pico's orthodoxy had been steadily increasing. He sold his lands to his nephew and, after providing himself against want, turned over the remainder of his wealth to charity. Forsaking his former role of prince, Mirandola sought quiet and study. At this time he wrote his "De Vera Temporis Supputatione," a work designed to refute Hebrew and Mohammedan doctrines which he had formerly upheld. Under the guidance of his confessor, Savonarola,¹ he assumed more and more that

¹ Unfortunately little is known of the relationship which existed between these two men. What authentic material exists may be found in Villari's "*Savonarola*." New York, 1896.

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mystical fervor which distinguished his last days.

Henceforth, authentic records of the actions of Pico become relatively scarce. In 1492 occurred the death of Lorenzo. Immediately following this event, Pico journeyed to Ferrara where he remained for several months. He then returned to Fiesole. There he spent most of his time writing his "Disputatum in Astrologiam," an attack upon astrology. This work was his last, although it was intended to serve as but part of a larger treatise on sects hostile to Christianity.

On November 4, 1494, the Count was stricken by a terrific infection. Long ago he had been told that he would die at the time when lilies bloomed in Florence.¹ Once more his horoscope fulfilled itself. Thirteen days later he breathed his last as the golden lilies of Charles VIII of France swept through the streets of the Tuscan capital. During his last moments, Pico was comforted by a vision of the holy Virgin.² His remains, invested by Savonarola with the order of the Dominicans, were

¹ This prophesy was uttered many years before by Camilla Rucellai, a disciple of Savonarola. Pater: "In the History of the Renaissance." London, 1873, 81-83.

² More: *op. cit.*, 10.

interred in the church of San Marco. Thus passed from the world the "Phoenix of the wits."¹

Pico has, in his transient journey on earth, given posterity a romantic hero of all times. Blazing across the sky of the Renaissance, this young Apollo drew his contemporaries to their knees in worship and admiration. Through their effort his name has been indelibly stamped upon the minds of men. He epitomizes art, learning and beauty.

Of the actual work of this paragon, little of real worth survives. Vanished are the poems of love "that train of Venus in which none were found plebians."² Their claim to greatness is slight, resting as it does on the praise of one biased critic. His theological treatises whose goal was the synchronization of all philosophical thought, have failed to secure for Pico his niche in the gallery of the great. Intended to Humanize religion, they have only created hypothetical abstractions.

What then may be the basis for a study of the

¹ Riggs: "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola." London, 189, v.

² Pico himself burned the "*Loves*" later in life, claiming them to be "products of his conquest by the devil, and so unworthy, of the "new" man and liable to destroy his moral reputation." "Politiani," Ep., op. cit., 7.

³ Greswell, op. cit., 170-171. Letter from Politian to Pico.

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man? The records of a most important part of his life he destroyed. Those of Pico's works which have survived are mediocre in quality and give little insight into his character. Must he become relegated to the realms of fancy, as a representation of the idealism of his age, or may he be judged by what is known of his actions?

Fortunately, Mirandola's contemporaries have left behind detailed accounts of his life. There is perhaps no one who has accomplished so little, of whom so much has been written. In recounting his life, his associates have permitted those less swayed by the personal magnetism of the man, to delineate his character.

From the day of his birth to the time of his death, Pico remained the petted darling of all who knew him. Inheriting wealth and position, he early found himself the center of an admiring group of people to whom those advantages are omnipotent and who, consequently, flattered and fawned upon him. His precocity, even at the early age of nine,¹ startled his admiring associates

¹ "Of his powers of reminiscence, particulars are related which almost exceed credibility. If he heard a poem but once recited he could, it is said, not only repeat the whole exactly in the same, but to the astonishment of his audience, do the like in retrograde order." Greswell, *op. cit.*, 155.

and led them to indite panegyrics in his honor. Endowed with beauty that was almost feminine in its loveliness,¹ all who gazed upon his features were held spellbound. Every attribute, each gift of fortune possessed by this young man was extravagantly praised by his friends.²

In the face of such constant admiration, Pico's head was quickly turned. Like Wilde's Narcissus, overcome with wonder and admiration at the picture of his reflected beauty, he sought to probe deeper and deeper into the pools

¹ Giovanni Francesco describes his uncle as being "of feature and shape seemly and beauteous, of statue goodly and high, of flesh tender and soft; his visage lovely and fair; his color white intermingled with comely reds; his eyes grey and quick to look, his teeth white and even; his hair yellow and abundant." More, *op. cit.*, 2.

² The following letters taken from Aldus and Alexander Corteus are typical of the constant praise leveled at Pico. Aldus in a letter to Politian says: "I quitted the city of Ferrara and repaired to Mirandola, to Giovanni Pico, the most learned man of the age." "Inter. Epistolæ Politiani."—Lib. vii, 7. Corteus in writing to Pico allows moderation to fly to the winds, saying: "Highly as I have conceived of you, you have, I acknowledge, surpassed my expectations. . . . Let us discuss this point with frankness, flattery apart, which is utterly incompatible to noble minds. . . What is there in you not extraordinary? What that commands not admiration? How many qualifications that would separately suffice to render a man illustrious are combined in your person. . . . Your talents are, in my estimation beyond all parallel . . . at most we may imagine but not hope to behold your like. Let the learned men allow me to say it without offense—Pico simply has surpassed them all. Pico on whom nature has been so lavish of her endowments that she may justly stand amazed at the effects of her own prodigality." "Pici opera," *op. cit.*, 271.

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which mirrored his glories. It was this love of self that led him at an early age to celebrate his numerous conquests in verse. What other reason can be ascribed to an act which, in the eyes of a person of taste, must appear tawdry and vain glorious?

Admiration, fostered by the remarkable reception accorded him by the savants of Florence, led Pico to look for fresh fields where he might feed his vanity. This search succeeded in heaping on him trouble and disaster. It accounts for the trip to Rome and the subsequent printing of his "Conclusiones." In a letter to Andreas Corneus of Urbino, Pico, while at Perugia preparing for his conquest of the capital of Christendom, frankly wrote: "I propose to set out forthwith for Rome and to pass the winter there if nothing unexpected intervenes to direct my steps elsewhere. Thence, possibly you may hear what proficiency your friend Pico hath been able to make in his sequestered monkish retirement and how far—if I may assume the tone of arrogance—he will be found to stand in need of literary assistance from the gathering of literatæ which you assure him he will not fail to meet with in that city."¹

¹ "Pici opera," op. cit., 258.

Simultaneously with a love of praise appeared the desire to please all. This trait brought Pico into constant compromise. The results of his search for knowledge at Perugia were quickly retracted at the first sign of displeasure from Rome. It also accounts in part for Mirandola's constant attempt to reconcile totally different trains of thought. Fearing censure, he refrained from allying himself too definitely with any section and so remained a timorous onlooker at a time when he might, by his own efforts, have gloriously advanced the torch of learning.

The reason for this indecision lay in the fact that the soul of Pico never matured. Ceaseless struggle and hurt have usually been the lot of the great. By it they have learned to know and to feel. Mirandola experienced none of these indispensable hardships. In consequence, the necessity for realizing one's convictions did not enter into his conscious actions. Everything came to him without effort. During his trouble at Rome, when for the only time in his career he found himself harried and opposed, he lost this chance of awakening, due to the immediate intervention on his behalf of Lorenzo de Medici and Ercole

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d'Este.¹ Always taken care of, the young genius never experienced the need for rousing himself to fight. Well wrought idealism, the idealism which can only be procured by contrast, was lacking in Pico, for if good alone exists, then there is no good.

Joy in living during the greater part of Mirandola's life, remained one of his outstanding characteristics. Then at the age of twenty-seven, a new force arose within him that exerted an overpowering influence over all his thoughts and actions. A strong realization and fear of the mysteries of death and judgment pervaded his senses. Showing at times an almost infantile terror, Pico wildly sought to prepare himself for his God, whom he felt sure he must encounter. He forcibly expelled light hearted youth and in its place substituted semi-monastic severity. From the role of *enfant terrible*, emerged the mystic.

Religion had always played more or less of an important role in the life of Pico. His mother early arrived at the conclusion that this youngest of her children was to dedicate himself to the service of the Lord. His studies at Bologna

¹ von Reumont, op. cit., 89.

resulted in his absorbing in all their intensity, fundamental principles of Christian theology and dogma. But, in the newly found joy of living which came to him, these teachings were buried beneath the brighter and more glainourous actualities of life. During this period, the somber principles with which he had been first imbued lay dormant, and were for the time being neglected.

Events at Rome brought these long sinouldering embers to the surface. In his fright, Pico did not resort to the principles of abstract thought to which he had dedicated his life. Threatened by the loss of the doctrine of salvation, an ideal which proved itself an inherent part of his character, the philosopher cast aside the principles his reason had formulated, in an effort to retain those tenets of faith which he believed contained the essence of being. The forgotten dictates of Christianity burst into flame and took possession of his soul. To gain redemption became the guiding force of his life.

Emotions such as these formed the basis for that mysticism which from now on exerted an important influence over the actions of Mirandola. Casting aside the temporal role of Prince he

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essayed the moral life of the disciple of Jesus. At Fiesole, beside the monastery which proffered him rest and peace, he attempted to attain monastic calm and quiet. Fasting, praying, torturing his body by self-inflicted punishment,¹ Pico sought the uttermost heights of spiritual fervor.

Despite this new manner of living, Pico did not for a moment relinquish his love of admiration. There remains no evidence from which one may conclude that he no longer cared for or was unaware of the plaudits of his friends and acquaintances. Intervals in which he was able to shake off the dread of final judgment were spent with his old companions. Politian stated that a rivalry existed between Pico and himself, which incited both men to maintain good tables and the finest wines.² When in the mood, Mirandola would forsake his religious severity and visit his friends, fully disguised, in order to drink in the praise with which they spoke of him.³ He wavered, turning from one extreme to the other, egoism ever over-coming constancy of purpose.

¹ Greswell, *op. cit.*, 329.

² *Ibid.*

³ "Politiani Epistolæ," *op. cit.*, lib. IV, ep. 7.

Curiosity and a real desire to learn were characteristics to which Pico allowed full expression. No man of his age—and for that matter few before or since—had in his possession so great an accumulation of knowledge as did this young philosopher. The thought of Chaldea, Arabia, France, Greece, Rome and Palestine were thrown open to him through his knowledge of the languages of these countries. His avidity for learning is demonstrated by his constant study and research. He eagerly devoured vast treatises and volumes of philosophical speculation. As a student, Pico proved himself capable, indefatigable and brilliant.

But no investigation is successful unless the results obtained are carefully weighed and facts of lesser worth are segregated and discarded. Pico lacked this final touch. It is therefore impossible to appreciate the intensity of his efforts as a scholar when so much of his labor was intentionally misguided. His life was occupied with wasted and unworthy endeavors. Politian, his firmest admirer, recognized this lack of discrimination and expressed the following epigram directed against astrologers who were, at the time, occupying the attention of Mirandola:

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"Bethink thee, Pico! Act the monk no more
To waste on Jugglers thy perverted lore."¹

Unable to determine the more worthy line of reason, the results of Pico's philosophical research are characterized by a want of firmness and clear-sightedness that deprive them of merit. Contradictions occur throughout his works. In spite of his superior erudition, he appeared unaware of the fact that there may exist two opposite lines of thought, each containing a number of opposing hypotheses, but each worthy. To him all must be reconciled in order that all may be right.

Lorenzo once said of Pico: "this man had it in his power to work immense good or evil."² There can be no doubt of the fact that possibilities of greatness existed, but the result was far different from that which Lorenzo anticipated. Mirandola did neither good nor evil but chose as the easiest way, the middle path which merely lead him to insincerity.

It must be admitted that the character of Pico was weak. His actions demonstrate contradictions, not between thought and its expression, as was the

¹ Greswell, *op. cit.*, 343.

² von Reumont, *op. cit.*, 92.

case with others of his time, but between conflicting ideas and ideals. His life lacked a consistent objective unless that end was recognition. A vein of uncertainty ruined whatever lasting worth his writings may have otherwise possessed.

Medievalism finally claimed Mirandola and ensnared him in its mire. Freedom of thought was unable to gain a foothold in the soul of this man. The reason for this failure lay in his unquestioning belief in the efficacy of Christian theology. Its precepts battled continually with instincts fashioned along Humanist lines. The undue repression which he in later years attempted to exert over what he considered the less worthy side of his nature, resulted in the inevitable extremes between which he was constantly obliged to run. His keenly attuned mind which grasped things without effort, together with the idolatrous recognition accorded him, completed his ruin. In consequence, the thoughts and actions of Pico represent a hideously perverted mixture of weakness, learning, pretence, mysticism and sensuality.

The Pico that has been here portrayed is not a very fit subject for the art of the romanticist. Stripped of those outer traits which have proven

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so bewildering, Mirandola remains a failure. He was afraid of life, loving nothing more than his own security and safety. Mentally and physically, he preferred to remain in the shadows of obscurity rather than face unknown dangers. If necessary he was always prepared to stifle that which was a part of him. Can one, after all, pay such a coward the compliment of saying he believed in anything other than in security? Did his mind ever exert itself over anything more than the mere retention of facts?

However, there is another interpretation of the character of Pico. Those who knew him loved and respected him. His beauty, brilliancy, and the gentleness of his nature drew admiration and recognition from his contemporaries. Due to the force of his personality, he has succeeded in becoming one of the heroic figures of the Renaissance. In the mists of centuries, students of life have been prone to glorify the man, overlooking his shortcomings because those who lived by his side were blinded to them.

Posterity reserving for itself the right of approbation or condemnation, now has a chance to exercise its judgment. One picture of Pico, that

given us by Thomas Moore, envisages the noblest deeds of man. Here is presented a portrait in which Mirandola is condemned, not so much for what he did, as for what he failed to accomplish. Which of the portraits most closely resembles the original? Need either be less worthy because it differs from the other? After all, do not the results merely depend upon the angle from which the figure under observation has been viewed?

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